



THE DIDACTIC IMPLICATIONS OF ANIMALS IN SISWATI PROSE NARRATIVES

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this article are to textually and didactically analyse the animals' narratives as a reflection of life. Their oral nature is accompanied by the involvement of visual and audial dimensions. These aspects are spontaneously enforcing and heightening oratory, comprehensive and audience active participation. The social fictions of folktales that are inevitably noted are aetiological function, morality, entertainment, social education and validation of culture. Folktales are multidisciplinary perspectives that are vital for both formal and informal education. They differ according to the nations, but share their significances and functions. Animal tales can share the characteristics of mythology, aetiology, magic, legends and fables, but their major characters remain the animals. Both textual and didactic approaches will complement each other to back up the study.

KEY WORDS: Aetiological function, Audial dimension, Audience participation, Didactical analyses and Morality.

INTRODUCTION

The educational function of folktales is emphasized by Bascom (1965:47) when he elaborates as that the general aims of any educational venture could be seen under the following headings:

- To help the child to appreciate and understand the culture into which he or she was born, to give the feeling of belonging and of being rooted in deep valuable culture which encompasses world view and value system.
- To equip the child to deal effectively with his environmental issues in comprehensive manner.
- To illuminate and broaden the child's life experience.

It is often argued that present-day scientific bias in education tend to stress the aim of education to the detriment of culture and social life which are seen as the objectives of literature, art and philosophy.

Bascom (1965:4) gives his views on the genre as follows:

Folktales are prose narratives which are regarded as fiction. They are not considered as dogma or history, they may or not have happened and they are not to be taken seriously. Nevertheless, although it is often said that are told only for amusement, they have other important functions, as the class of moral folktales should have suggested. Folktales may be set in any time and any place and in this sense they are almost timeless and placeless. A variety of sub-types of folktales can be distinguished including human tales, animal tales, trickster tales, tall tales, dilemma tales, formulaic tales and moral tales or fables.

The animal tales have been the most popular and well-known type of African narratives. Most tales which were narrated by the grandmothers includes animals as characters. There are those which include people only but they are very few as compared to those tales which are based on animals. Finnegan (1970:353) postulates that:

The stories are often amusing in themselves, they fitted in with certain preconceptions about say, totemism or the supposed "child-like mentality" of Africans, and they provided pleasing parallels to the Uncle Remus stories of America which they had ultimately fathered.

The result is the many more animals stories have been published than those about other characters, and the impression has often been given that animal tales form the main type of prose narrative or even of oral literature altogether.

The proportion of animal stories seems to have been much exaggerated. In some areas, at least stories mainly about people or supernatural beings seem to be preferred or to be more elaborated, lengthy or serious. Finnegan (1970:353) contends that it is not easy to work out the numerical and qualitative relationship between animal and other stories in different areas. It is postulated that animal tales are the most popular form in central and East Africa.

Attempts have been made to trace the historical and geographical origin of tales in Africa. Finnegan (1970:321) maintains that certain plots can be reckoned as being indigenous to Africa. An example of this is the famous tale based on the idea of a tug of war in which two large animals, the hippopotamus and the ele-

phant are induced surreptitiously by small animal to pull against each other. They are made to believe that their opponent is really the small weak animal. They do not realise that this is a trick played upon them by a hare. Another allegedly African motif is that of "death" from a false message, in which the wrong message is given to mankind so that they have to undergo death instead of living forever. It has been argued that their motifs come from outside Africa.

Finnegan (1970:321) maintains that other African motifs have been given a poly-genetic origin or still remain to be analysed. She further state that the fascination of this approach, has sometimes blinded commentators to the significance of other aspects of African narrative prose. There has been a tendency to play down the significance of the story as a whole in favour of an attempt to trace back the detailed history of certain elements of its subject-matter.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher gathered information by means of semi-structured one-to-one interviews and textual approach.

Semi-structured Interviews

Detailed information on themes and topics are outlined (De Vos et al 2011:351). A voice recorder is used during interviews to capture all information that is ultimately transcribed for analysis. Wysocki (2008: 228) postulates the following:

Ethics in research are guidelines that enable the researcher to ensure that all respondents participate voluntarily and are not harmed.

According to Gray (2009: 576), the endorsement of the above postulation is enhanced as follows:

Ethics in research are study standards of conduct and values and how they impact on the research and research subjects.

These definitions relate research morals to an approach that conforms to the practices of the habitants of the study field, thus accommodating their philosophies and lifestyles.

An analysis of the roles of animals is carried out by comparing animals' activities in various stories. Research is conducted in INkomazi Region, eastern part of Mpumalanga Province. Grandmothers were of great help to us when conducting the research. This study focuses on the divisions of these animals tales in the following way:

Mythological Tales: under this heading all tales that deal with the origin of things are grouped together. The animal tales deal with the creation, death and aetiology –purporting to explain the origin of some animal characteristics.

Animal Tales: animals are the principal characters which are handled under these headings. They are sub-divided into the following:

- Mythical animals which are fabulous and are not creations of magic or witchcraft.
- Magic animals which are creations of magic.

- Ordinary animals – most animal tales that do not purport to explain the origin of things and in which only animals are found and no human beings.
- Animals with human traits – animals and human beings appear with animals entering into relationship with people either as messengers or lovers or helpers.

Text Analysis

To carry out the analysis of data, this study employs text analysis. In his definition, McKee (2003: 1) explains textual analysis as follows:

A way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world.

Textual analysis enables researchers to make informed scholarly understanding, clarifications and findings about peoples' perceptions towards social events. Therefore, it ascertains a correct perception in analysing data pertinent to this study and how participants perceive folklore.

DIDACTIC IMPLICATIONS

Animal tales highlight the characteristics which the animals have namely: didactic, morals and imitation as seen in animals. These characteristics help to compare their characteristics with those of human beings in the practical life. Folktales were highly instructional and didactic in nature from time immemorial. Even though the created story have animals as main characters, the theme remained overshadowed by the interesting characteristics were that of methodologies, processes and presentations.

Grandmothers in their narration would not tell the objectives of the story to the children, but these would spontaneously not go unnoticed because children would deduce them from the story. Novelists in modern society, use the same method for they do not drive down our throats their moral values in many pages, but we as readers, deduce from their stories the objectives and morals. Mofokeng (1951:195) explicitly says the following:

The same should really be expected of these tales which like short stories have less space and time than novels from stressing a moral that stands so clearly from the story.

In animal tales, the didactic implications cannot go unnoticed even when not mentioned.

TRUSTWORTHY AND FAITHFULNESS

Faithfulness is a token of good gesture. It is worthwhile to be trustworthy and be faithful to mankind. It is unfortunate to state that not all people are worth trust. A story is told about the baboon and the tortoise to show that one should not trust strangers. It is said that a tortoise once met a baboon and after talking to it for a while, suggested that they should each plant a fruit tree so that they would have fruits of their own. At first, the baboon did not agree because it always finds enough to eat on other people's trees. When it saw the tortoise set to work, it also began to plant. Whereas the tortoise worked thoroughly and dug a deep hole, the baboon merely scratched the surface of the soil, stuck in his tree and strewed some ashes around it. The trees began to grow. That of the tortoise became a fine tree, but that of the baboon withered and died. After sometime, the tree of the tortoise bore lovely, rich fruit. It was unfortunate that the tortoise could not climb up the tree to pick the fruits. The baboon came strolling along and the tortoise begged him to climb up and pick some fruits. The baboon clambered up, but once on the tree it took no more notice of the tortoise, which shouted till its voice was hoarse, but received no fruits.

This story illustrates the belief that a stranger must not be trusted. You have to know a man before you entrust him with your treasure. The baboon was a cunning stranger who plucked fruits for his own benefit. It is wise to keep the stranger at arm's length. The child is expected to learn from the story that unfaithful strangers can be ruthless.

LAZINESS AND IDLENESS

Under this moralistic version, we find a story about a rock-rabbit which has no tail because it was lazy to accompany other animals when they had gone to collect their tails. This is a very common folktale and it is found in different indigenous languages. In Siswati there is a proverb which says:

Imbila yeswela umsila ngekulayetela

(The dassie lacked a tail by giving directions to others)

The dassie's incident serves as an example to show that procrastination is the thief of time. Any tardy person feels threatened by the example of a rock-rabbit which cannot wag a tail. When it went to the cow, the cow was furious. It loded, kicked and charged the man. The cow felt the man had no business to drink the milk of a cow he never looked after.

When the man realizes his plight, he called for his dog to assist him to control the "mad" cow. He never cared to befriend and feed the dog. The dog refused to help

the man who had never helped it. The dog refuses to help the man who wants to milk the cow which refuses to give milk to the man who does not give it good grass and hay.

The chain story does not only teach against laziness but trains the children to correlate action, to chain activity and to memorise and retell the story. There is also an underlying theme on love and care to animals as our friends.

SELFISHNESS AND GREEDINESS

The folktale about the monkey and peanuts told in Siswati version indicates to us that one should not be greedy and selfish. In this story the monkey stole peanuts which were dried up by the farmers for their horses to feed on the next day. Unfortunately, one of the peanuts fell on the ground while it had only eaten three of them. The monkey then climbed down to pick this one which had fallen. When it was still busy looking for it, one of the farmers came with a sjambok and punished the monkey. All the other peanuts fell down while it was still running away. It never ate the peanuts it had stolen.

Selfishness and greediness cause losses and lead to destruction.

... pho umona wenkawu unguwucedza yini?

(Can greediness as exhibited by the monkey be controlled?)

In one of the stories about the hare, we find that the hare helped the lion which was about to die because of hunger. The lion is known as the king of animals, but the hare appeared to be more intelligent than the lion. The hare managed to get food for the lion through its tricky ways. Due to selfishness, the lion did not want to share that food with the hare which had helped to get it. The hare decided to make a plan to kill the lion ultimately it was killed in the hailstorm. The hare remained with all the meat.

This story challenges the children to evaluate whether might and greediness are strong enough to conquer wit and intelligence, and to encourage them to ponder whether it was not right from nature to let greed suffer and die. In most cases this story might end up with a proverb:

Imikhombe iyenana

(One good turn deserves another)

FOOLHARDY AND LUDICROUSNESS

The story about the hyena and the moon is a well-known fable. A hyena, carrying a bone in its mouth, came to the river. Seeing the beautiful reflection of the moon in the water, it dropped its bone and jumped into the water to catch the moon. The hyena thought the moon was a nice, fat piece of meat. As it dived again and again into the river to get the "piece of meat", another hyena came and took the bone away. Therefore, the hyena is much laughed at for its stupidity. It threw away what it had in order to catch what it could not get. The children might be asked to find a suitable proverb. The clever ones might easily exclaim:

A bird in hand is worth two in a bush.

In another folktale about Imphisi nesikhukhukati (A hyena and the hen) we find that the hyena appeared very stupid when it was attracted by an empty tin which was on top of the tree. The hyena decided to leave the hen and take an empty tin. The hyena thought this tin contained a lot of meat as compared to a thin hen which it allowed to go. When the hyena climbed up the tree to get the tin, it was embarrassed to discover that the tin was empty and did not contain the meat it thought it had. The hyena was discouraged and went away with an empty stomach because the hen also runs away.

From the two stories mentioned above, the following proverbs are found:

Ayihlabi ngakumisa

Don't judge a thing by its appearance)

Lifa letiwula lidliwa tihlakaniphi

The wealth of the foolish is used by the clever ones)

CUSTOMARY BELIEFS

There are some animals which were respected by the Africans. These animals were never killed when seen in the yard or hut of the family. For example, we have spirit-snakes. The Africans, especially the Swazis regarded some snakes as lidloti (ancestor). When an ancestor wishes to visit the world or the family, it does so in the form of a snake. Krige (1936:285) expresses the following:

It does not enter the body of an existing snake, but materialises into one.

There were certain distinct and well known kinds of snakes that were definitely regarded as spirits. Krige (1936:285) further maintains that a chief or a village head turn into a black or green mamba.

All people who were dead became different kinds of snakes whenever they visited their families. A young mamba is however, the spirit of a male child. The Swazi believes this to be a distinct species of a snake. In some clans the umzingandlu (a small harmless snake), was regarded more particularly as the spirit of a female, because it was food of dark nooks in the huts. It was believed that these snakes were not supposed to be killed as it was the head of the family who had paid them a visit, or called lidloti (ancestor).

This kind of belief taught children and adults to respect snakes and these made-beliefs animals. These animals would not be killed anyhow because of fear that something bad might happen to him or to the family.

The scared animals were respected by the African people. If someone attempted to kill them, he would be severely punished by the authorities. In some cases, he would be driven out from his land of birth. Hollis (1909:6) give this information: In former times the killing of this scared animal, or totem, by the clansman was strictly forbidden, and any breach of this law was severely dealt with, the offender being put to death or driven out of his clan and his cattle confiscated.

A number of beliefs in the idea of sacred animals brought home to the mind of the children the idea of unity, worship and respect. The respect for life of animals by the entire clansman created tribe's solidarity. There was no question of belief. All people believed what they were told. Children easily assimilated religious beliefs and practised them.

The belief in the power behind the life of an animal was rife. Many stories were told to show the presence of this power. The baboon was associated with witchcraft, the cow with ritual, the tinyandezulu (species of green snakes) with ancestors and luck.

RESULTS

The background and characteristics of animal tales is traced. Concerning these themes mentioned above and the others discussed in this paper, we discovered the following in animal tales:

They are educative or rather didactic. From the stories narrated by grandparents a child gets different lessons. The child will know that he should not do something bad, and once he or she does a bad thing, some kind of punishment will be inflicted on him or her.

They teach children and even grown up people to treat others as their brothers, sisters, and also as human beings. They should not treat people like slaves. In the story, U-Andeleka Nelibhubesi (Andeleka and the lion), we find that Andeleka was saved by a lion when he was a slave. He escaped from slavery through the mercy of the lion.

Children are taught to walk with open eyes and open minds. Children should know how things originated and why some animals behave in a unique way. This is seen in the behaviour of fowls which are always scrapping the ground as if they are looking for something and why they run away when the hawk flies down in hunt for chicks. This can also be confirmed by the proverbs which are daily used in Siswati language:

Uz' ubone lingce lihlotuk' intsamo?

(Is this the first of its kind that you come across a wretched vulture?)

Akukho ndlovu yasindvwa ngumboko wayo.

(There is no elephant which can be overloaded by its tusk)

The children will trace how these proverbs came to being. Some proverbs originate from folktales, but in some cases folktales originate from proverbs. How tales encourage children to observe their religious beliefs, their tradition or customs, and the national sociocultural background. For example, the story which is about the spirit snake which behaved like: lidloti (ancestor).

The contribution made by animal stories so that children are exposed to correct social behaviour. As a human being one should know what good human relations in the normal society is. Good human relations will in a way help people to bury the hatchet and live like brothers.

Children are expected to realise that if they despise their less privileged neighbours, they might be despising intelligence and not lack of privilege. This is found in the story where the tortoise won the race competition against all the fast animals. The importance of listening to the instructions given to you is evident in this folktale. For example, in the story about "The chameleon and a lizard" we find that the Chameleon did not listen to the instructions given to it by the creator. As a result people did not take the message it conveyed. From this story, children will realise that when you are sent by an adult, you should go straight to the point and come back with the reply.

NEIGHBOURHOOD AND BROTHERHOOD

Neighbourhood and brotherhood are depicted in the folktale Tinyoni

nemagundwane (Birds and the Mice). They lived harmoniously together lived like human beings. The behaviour of these animals in this story is totally human. Each family enjoyed the other family's company. One day, the birds were trapped in a farmer's net and were helpless. Fortunately, one bird was not trapped, then it ran back home to report to the mice, who were their neighbours. The mice were quite sympathetic and then rushed to help the birds. They tore the net and the birds were freed.

This story indicates that if someone is in trouble you should help him or come to his rescue. Children will then deduce from the story that it is very important to live harmoniously and peacefully with your neighbours. This type of a living promotes the spirit of brotherhood.

Through observation, it is noticed that in African culture, some neighbours are deviants. Instead of living harmoniously they fight and destroy peace. Hence, children would be told not to visit their neighbours because of deviant behaviour. In order to show the evil nature of this behaviour, the old lady might tell the tale of a hare and a lion. In this tale, the lion was hungry and then requested the hare to help him in order to get food. The hare made an intelligent plan to attract other animals so that the lion could get food. When a number of animals had been killed, the lion refused to offer the hare some meat. The hare then decided to kill the lion by making it to work on the roof of the hut they were building, and was then killed by storm. Both these stories indicate that children should love their neighbours, help them whenever they need help, and treat each other in a brotherly way. Loving your neighbour and helping him will eliminate the element of hatred and jealousy.

DISCUSSION

Animal tales also play a major in the educational aspect of the people. Adults and children found their use serviceable for various purposes. The animal tales kept children in check. They would not go out in the evening as they would wait for folktale to be narrated to them. Children would remain in-doors until they go to sleep using these narrated folktales. Children would fear to go out in the evening because of the alleged monster which would kill and eat them.

Animal tales gave a chance to the adults to teach children how to listen and how to speak. Children would learn to concentrate when someone is speaking. They were also given a chance to narrate backing their own animal tales and further taught them how to speak to both adults and their equals. Retention was also encouraged by means of oral folklore. Children would be tested whether they still remembered the story which was told to them a day before. The coming together of adults and children created a medium for easy family communication.

Children were not allowed to listen over the folktales during the day, because much work would not be done as they would be concentrating on the narrated folktale. Boys would leave the cattle to feed on the fields and thus creating problems for the family. Girls on the other hand, would not do their work at home because of being taken up by these folktales. It was much better when these tales were told in the evening when the day's work had been completed and a relaxed atmosphere had been created for talking, listening and retelling.

Children were taught to do things at the correct and suitable time. Doing things in a chronological order was emphasized. Through the animal tales, children learn to respect all kinds of animals and kinds of human beings. Children will know that they should not undermine other people because of some characteristics which they have. The story about the tortoise which won the race competing against all the fast animals is a good example. The tale indicates that the faster animals boisterously ridiculed the tortoise and did not intelligently check on its clever tricks. The tortoise used its wits and not its speed to win the race. Children are expected to realise that if they despise their less privileged neighbour, they might be despising intelligence and not lack of privilege. In that competition their hare-like speed might lose against the tortoise tricks. It is therefore noted that cleverness is greater than prowess.

CONCLUSION

Animal tales play a major role in the life of the human beings. Animals are part of us and we need them in the various perspectives of our life. There are some animals which we cannot do without. Besides the folktales that we have heard about animals, there are so many things that we get from them, like clothes, expensive jewellery, medicines and others.

African people were previously known as people without literature and culture. But through the intellectuals of Africa, this has been proven wrong despite having no written records of literature. The only narrated events and stories out of memory. The absence of written records forced the African people to be excellent in their memory. This is an indication that the narrative prose was endeared by the African people. It is the way they lived and the way they taught their children the right and wrong. Animal stories contributed a lot to the life of the African child to teach them what is right, acceptable and human.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Folktales should further be narrated to children so that the traditional behaviour and African customs be enlivened and sustained. It is observed that nowadays

folktales are no longer common, due to cultural and temporal dynamics. Grandparents and parents are held up at work, children are attending school, so there is no time to narrate and listen over the folktales. Everybody comes back home tired, children have to study their works and do their home works. Therefore, folktales should be written down in books and be prescribed in schools as part of the curriculum.

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